



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE
AUDUBON SOCIETY OF THE EVERGLADES
Serving Palm Beach County, Florida

Volume 48, Number 6

March 2008

CALENDAR

SAT. Mar. 1, 8 a.m.

ASE Bird Walk: Okeeheelee Nature Center, 7715 Forest Hill Blvd., West Palm Beach. North side of Forest Hill, 1 mile west of Jog Road (east of turnpike). Meet at Nature Center. Leader: Scott Scheinhaus.

TUES. Mar. 4, 7:30 p.m.

General meeting, Howard Park Community Center, West Palm Beach.

SAT. Mar. 8, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

3rd Annual Turtle Day, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, Boca Raton. Ocean Blvd. (A1A) between (the closest bridges) Palmetto Park Road and Spanish River Blvd. To volunteer at ASE's exhibit, call Sue, 561-27-7829. roysue@bellsouth.net

THURS. Mar. 13, 8 a.m.

ASE visits Folke Peterson Wildlife Center in Wellington. Meet at 9:45 AM at the north end of the Lowe's parking lot on Highway 441 just south of Southern Boulevard. For reservations, call Dorothy Brindle (561)586-6797

April 4-6

Audubon Academy 2008, Vero Beach, Florida. Audubon Chapters: Champions for a Better Florida

SAT. Apr. 12, 8 a.m.

Spanish River Park, Boca Raton. Workshop: More Tips for Better Birding, Paddy Cunningham. The workshop will include a long hike to observe spring birds that will apply and reinforce the skills discussed. For more information, visit www.birdadventure.com.

Sunset/Moonrise Cruise in the Lake Worth Lagoon—April 20

It's not too soon to make plans for this annual event. We meet at 6:45 PM at the Banyan Street dock in downtown West Palm Beach. It is a 2-hour cruise past the Audubon Sanctuary Islands to the Snook Islands in Lake Worth. You are welcome to bring refreshments or a picnic dinner. The price is \$25 per person.

Please call Claudine for reservations (561)655-9779.

From Black Gold to the Black Oystercatcher: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska

Taldi Walter was born in Fairbanks, Alaska, but raised in a small town in one of the most beautiful places in the United States: the Flathead Valley of Northwestern Montana. She majored in biology at the University of Central Arkansas. She later received her Master's degree in Biology and studied the exotic invasive plant species *Lonicera japonica* (Japanese honeysuckle) in Brazil. After completing her Master's degree, Ms. Walter joined the National Audubon Society's Public Policy Office in Washington, D.C as the Alaska Outreach Coordinator.

During her first year with National Audubon Taldi traveled throughout the country, taking Audubon members on a virtual tour to some of Alaska's most stunning natural treasures through her multimedia presentation focused on the top Alaska conservation issues. Taldi will present an informative presentation showcasing some of the important natural areas and brilliant birds found in wild Alaska. The presentation will explore some of Alaska's natural treasures set aside decades ago for the benefit of wildlife and the American public. She'll highlight the imminent and compelling challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

Please join us at Howard Park Community Center at 7:30 p.m. on March 4th for this fascinating presentation about the natural areas of our largest state.

President's Comments

Marcella Munson

As many of you know, I expect the arrival of Z, my unborn and as yet unnamed son in the next several weeks. For my last column as President, I thought I would write him a letter

Dear Z,

From time to time, I'm sure your friends are going to ask you why I care so deeply about the environment you're about to inherit. The answer, like many truths, is not simple. But, like most truths, it's worth hearing. You, son, are going to be a cracker. That means you have a special legacy, and a special future. Your legacy has so far been one of reaching after paradise and watching it slip through our fingers. The Everglades is dammed and ditched; Lake Okeechobee is surrounded by a leaky moat. Your future is uncertain; you may have to leave the state due to ocean level rise, or you may preside over an unprecedented environmental recovery. Which one will be up to us, and up to you.

In 1976, when I was a little girl of seven, I remember watching a Bald Eagle soar in the sky over its two-chick nest in Coos Bay, Oregon, and being told by my father that I was witnessing not just a beautiful sight, but a precious and rare one, as so very few of these magnificent creatures were successfully breeding despite the banning of DDT by the EPA four years earlier. But in the years since, our nation's symbol has recovered from an all-time low of 417 nesting pairs, to the over 10,000 nesting pairs recorded in 2007. Did you know that you will be born in the Lower-48 state with the second-largest breeding population of Bald Eagles? That's pretty special.

Among the many things that I wish for you, Z, is a world where, thanks to the hard work of thousands of concerned citizens and scientists working in tandem, in part through organizations such as Audubon, it will be possible for other species that are now facing steep population declines to make similarly dramatic comebacks. I wish for you a world where it will be possible for you to see the same birds that we have now, but with even greater frequency and in even greater numbers. I know you'll have a home where your parents love you; I wish for you a community filled with the type of people it has been my privilege to lead for the last two years—friends and colleagues whose hard work is inspirational, and who continue to prove that environmental change is attainable. I wish you a world where humans live in balance with the larger ecosystem, and, inspired by direct contact with nature, privilege the ecosystem accordingly. I wish for you many wondrous moments of nature-gazing.

In short, I wish for you the world.

The Everglade Kite

is the newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Everglades, published 11 times a year.

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Audubon Society of the Everglades, incorporated in 1966, serves communities in Palm Beach County. Our purpose is to promote the conservation of wildlife and the natural environment and to advance human understanding of our place in the total ecological system.

ASE's general elections will be held next month at our April meeting. Please consider volunteering in any capacity. Our organization is only as strong as you make it.

Useful Websites

Loxahatchee River District:
www.loxahatcheeriver.org
Folke Peterson Wildlife:
www.fpwildlife.org
South Florida Water Management:
www.sfwmd.gov
Board of County Commissioners:
www.pbcgov.com/countymcommissioners/

Conservation Report

Some things just don't go away. ASE is working hard with Loxahatchee NWR and other environmental groups, on the issue of siting a new, huge **landfill** directly on the Refuge's western side in agricultural lands in the Everglades Agricultural Area. We have met several times with Solid Waste Authority staff and they are looking for potential sites elsewhere. At the same time, SWA is still working on permitting for the EAA site, which will require huge expenses for an adequate road. LNWR has a long list of critical issues, including blown trash, aggressive-predatory bird species attracted and detrimental to rookeries, water quality/leachate into the refuge.

Roebuck Rd extension has finally surfaced and they are looking to put it through WPB's water catchment area, now known as Grassy Waters Preserve. Potential is to connect it up with SR 7/US 441, on the still debatable route around the Pond Cypress Natural Area or through Grassy Waters on the old rangeline route. Both Paton White and I will be attending stakeholders meetings with WPB on this terrible threat to our water supply and preserves.

Budget hearings for both PB County and municipalities will be occupying a lot of time for conservation advocates. Mandatory budget cutbacks, based on decreased revenue forecasts are likely to be very painful for all elected officials. All environmental and conservation advocates should be prepared to attend all budget meetings, to speak for adequate funds for maintenance and staff for our natural areas, preserves and parks; on invasive exotics control and water conservation and natural landscaping programs for all levels of government.

Don't forget the important programs of the **IFAS County Extension**, either. Remember that scare we had this last Fall on the danger of losing the whole Mounts/Extension complex. The extension services encompass family and counseling, 4-H programs, agricultural and water programs, besides providing a home for many horticultural organizations.

Most of PB Co's **land acquisitions** under the bond issue are over. Now, there are obligations on parcels bought in conjunction with Florida Communities Trust, for maintenance, exotic removals and facilities. If those obligations are not met, we could lose some important conservation lands. The Natural Areas Management Advisory Committee met and had a presentation on these very subjects. Our hard won conservation lands are not expendable and PB Co. has received recognition statewide. Check the Monday listings in PB POST of government meetings, or call PB Co. ERM, 561-233-2400.

Cynthia

Leah Schad –Audubon and Environmental Champion

Our ASE chapter lost one of the most determined defenders of the Everglades and environmental matters on January 30, 2008. At the time, she was our Treasurer and general fundraiser, but actually Leah Schad was our true friend and staunchest activist on behalf of birds, ecosystems, good government, and consummate officer in any organization she took on.

Her roles, well documented in the *Palm Beach Post*, ranged from birdathons and bird censuses, Everglades Day, former President, as well as Treasurer, organizer of multiple fundraisers (Including a "roast" of Rosa "Cissie" Durando), Governing Board of SFWMD, to Florida Audubon Chair, and National Audubon Society board and advocating for environmental education. Leah literally knew everyone and provided us with contacts and information sources EVERY DAY!! She mentored innumerable friends, students and associates in the intricacies of being effective, on behalf of those issues so critically important to Florida.

Leah, you have left us a huge legacy, and huge hole to fill in our chapter. Truly unique, and inspiring, ASE's challenge is to be worthy of your trust and confidence.

Cynthia

Bird of the Month: Northern Cardinal

Ben Kolstad

The Redbird, most early American settlers and explorers, like Mark Catesby (one of the earliest ornithologists to explore “La Florida”) called it. John James Audubon called it Cardinal Grosbeak. And there’s no denying it has a large beak. *Cardinalis cardinalis*, or Northern Cardinal, is the *nom de plume* assigned by modern taxonomists. But why northern? Is there a southern cardinal against which it must be differentiated? Worldwide, there are 6 finches (in the giant family of Buntings, Seedeaters, and Allies) called Cardinal: Yellow, Red-crested, Red-cowled, Red-capped, Crimson-fronted, and Yellow-billed. And among the Cardinals, Saltators, and Allies, there are only 2 with the Cardinal name: our Northern Cardinal, and the intriguing Vermilion Cardinal, a South American species. But as far as our North American birds go, there is only one, *Cardinalis cardinalis*, the Northern Cardinal. If you’re birding with Rick Wright out in Arizona, you might see a red bird with a yellow bill that looks a bit like a cardinal, but that’s the Pyrrhuloxia (*Cardinalis sinuatus*). But no, there is no such thing as a Southern Cardinal. So why Northern? Not sure, really...

One thing is sure, though: our bird, the “true” Cardinal, is easily distinguished from 99.9% of all other North American bird species. (*Hint: It’s The Red One!*) In our area, possibilities for confusion with other birds are quite limited: the rare Vermilion Flycatcher (possible in winter, but not bloody likely!), Hepatic Tanager, (unrecorded in Florida), Scarlet Tanager (“a generally rare migrant...more numerous in spring than in fall except toward the east coast”), or Summer Tanager (breeds in N Florida, and possible throughout the state). And only the male Summer Tanager in breeding plumage is all red; the others have black wings, or aren’t even red. And when you look up front, they all have much smaller bills (remember Audubon’s name for the bird, Cardinal Grosbeak). All of the aforementioned species are in the ballpark, sizewise, although the cardinal is the largest of the lot, at about 21–23 cm (what we regular folk call 8–9 inches). But of them all, it’s the only one with a crest on the head, and a big honking orange-red seed-cracking bill.

The call of the cardinal has to be one of the greatest hooks for getting people into birding: who can resist a bird that sings out loudly “Cheer! cheer! cheer!” (also transcribed as “*wheeta wheeta wheeta*” or “*wheet whee wheat*”)? Another common call is a slow “*tew, tew, tew, tew*” and a faster “*too-too-too-too*” (transcriptions from *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion*). And the male is truly a stunning bird, singing loudly from a conspicuous perch, red crest flared, super-red conical bill slightly open, with a black mask extending from throat to eyes on the face being the only departure from the red red red of the rest of it.

Last month in my neighborhood marked the first true territorial singing, from insistent and long early in the morning (great alarm clock!) to more interrupted but still frequent throughout the day. The female sings as well, although not as often or as insistently as the male. Her song more often takes the form of countersinging, forming a duet with her mate or, from time to time, intimidating rival females who might envy her territory or her male.

This bird is a year-round resident; there is no significant migration. The singing signals the arrival of new hormones, not new birds.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Two firsts and some noteworthy numbers highlighted this year’s Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 29th. 44 participants on 12 teams fanned out across the count circle, from the ocean to the eastern edge of Loxahatchee Refuge, and from the south end of West Palm Beach to northern Delray Beach.

While wintering bird numbers seem low again this year and we continue to lose habitat, we got a big break with great weather. Our counters logged 140 countable species, a very respectable number and a true team effort.

First ever records for our count: Pomarine Jaeger (2), seen by Brian Hope and Andrew Knafla late in the day at Boynton Inlet (only “Jaeger species” had been previously recorded—4 times). Red Knot (1), also reported by Brian and Andrew in the south end of the city of Lake Worth.

Noteworthy numbers: An astounding (and very beautiful) 150 Hooded Mergansers, the most ever on our count, tallied by Linda McCandless and Pinya Cohen on a pond in a West Boynton-Delray development. 27 Snail Kites, the largest number since 1974, seen by the Loxahatchee Refuge team, coming off a roost there (smaller numbers noted by other teams).

An adult Bald Eagle, reported by two teams, and 7 Roseate Spoonbills, observed by Linda and Pinya, were nice additions. Even though the Spoonbills should probably be elsewhere nesting this time of year.

We had just three Robins, only two Goldfinches. Other winter regulars (Common Loon, Forster’s Tern, Cedar Waxwing), we missed altogether.

As Cynthia Plockelman noted at the count compilation, improvements to habitat and water quality in the Lake Worth Lagoon are likely why the species total remains as high as it is. Shorebirds, never or rarely seen on the count, have been recorded in the Lagoon in recent years. This year in addition to Red Knot, Brian and Andrew had 5 Dunlin (only the 5th time on the count), two teams reported Short-billed Dowitcher (7th time), and three teams noted American Oystercatchers (5th time). And although not seen on count day, Piping Plovers (1-4) were observed during “count week.”

Thanks to Cynthia Plockelman for hosting the compilation. And thanks to all participants, for putting in long hours in the field. Each team registered important numbers, contributing to a successful count.

Meeting Report

At our February meeting, Ann Hodgson of AoF gave ASE members a presentation on the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries Program, which manages over 50 colonies along the Gulf Coast, and the historic Palm Beach County sanctuaries with the Audubon Society of the Everglades. She presented the threats posed to beach-nesting birds from human disturbance, which is quite a problem here in Palm Beach County. Of particular concern is the short lifespan of No Trespassing signs. Within days of posting signs in the Lake Worth sanctuary islands, the signs are defaced, destroyed, or removed by vandals. Palm Beach County deputies refuse to ticket trespassers when there is no sign posted; we need to find a way to monitor the signs and discourage vandals from taking them down. If we have any volunteers with a boat, a spotting scope, or other ideas, please let us know. The birds in the lagoon need all the help they can get! Last year we fledged the first American Oystercatcher in decades from the Lagoon; with more help, we might really be able to turn these islands into a productive area! If you can help, please contact Claudine Laabs, ASE’s Sanctuaries chair, 561-655-9779.

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Reminder: Deadline for submissions for the **April 2008** issue is **March 15th**

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The Audubon Society of the Everglades General Meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at Howard Park Community Center in West Palm Beach. The phone number for the Community Center is (561) 835-7055. The public is welcome to attend.